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## GOMEROCK CASTLE.



# GOMEROCK CASTLE:

OR

THE GRAVE OF THE UNKNOWN.

BY

A. H. HOLDSWORTH, ESQ.



LONDON:  
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TO

COLONEL T. W. TAYLOR, C.B.

*Of Ogwell House,*

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR OF THE ROYAL MILITARY  
COLLEGE, SANDHURST,  
ETC. ETC. ETC.

---

MY DEAR TAYLOR,

More than half a century has passed away since we together drew our wooden swords, and issued from our encampment on the summit of a mound within the warren at Coomb Royal, and charged with our imaginary army the thistles which had ventured to take post within our little territory.

Years have rolled on, and you have changed your wooden sword for one of deadlier temper, and have wielded it in your country's cause, from the banks of the Sutlej to Java's sultry plains, from Waterloo to Paris: whilst your pen has told of those brave comrades who were led to victory by GILLESPIE at Cornelis—has chased the Flying Dutchman in his phantom-ship—and registered the brave Guerilla's vow

“ Of vengeance on the ruthless foe  
Who spoils our native land.”

The imagery of early life has not forsaken you.

To whom, then, can I dedicate the legend of Gomerock Castle so fitly as to yourself?—for, if the history of one who perished there should fail in interest, my

tale may yet call to your remembrance the inhabitants of the “Gull’s Nest” and Brookhill.

Accept it, then, as a token of regard, from one who was your earliest playmate, school-fellow, and friend,

THE AUTHOR.

*Brookhill, Nov. 1, 1844.*



## GOMEROCK CASTLE:

OR

## THE GRAVE OF THE UNKNOWN.

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WHEN Dartmouth sent a goodly company of 750 men, and above thirty ships, to assist the third Edward at the siege of Calais—and when, to avenge himself for wrongs done on his coast, the Admiral of Bretagne attempted a descent on Dartmouth, and his army was driven precipitately back into their ships, leaving the Lord du Chastel, with other officers of rank slain in fight, and 100 men prisoners to the gallant defenders of the town—and when the Lancastrian party availed them-

The skeleton was lying on its back, with the head turned, as if resting, when buried, on the right shoulder, the left arm uplifted above the head, whilst the right was close to the body. The whole bore testimony to a hasty interment.

The men eagerly told of what had happened when they returned to Kingswear. The story flew from mouth to mouth ; and, on the second day after the discovery, the man who found the bones informed his fellow-labourers that he had no doubt of their being the remains of a woman, for he had heard a story which went strongly to prove it. “There was a woman,” said he, “more than a century ago, who used to frequent that Castle. She was often seen wandering about the adjoining cliffs, but suddenly disappeared ; and I have no doubt but these bones must be the remains of that unfortunate creature.”

The man whom he addressed smiled at his

story, for he was a stranger; and the other, vexed at his want of faith, continued—" You may smile, but I could name the persons who have seen a woman's form pass close before them here, in the night, and suddenly be lost. Strange things were spoken of before our master came to live here: noises were heard, and Mountain's Gate has opened for the traveller without mortal hands."

Who Mountain was, that gave to that mysterious gate his name, or why the house in which he dwelt was suffered to decay, and a small portion only to remain to mark the spot, no one can tell. But at the time it stood there, it was the last from Kingswear; beyond it there was no trace of house or dwelling, save only the ruins of Gomerock Castle, and a square tower which stands upon the rocks, more distant towards the sea, and of more modern character.

A surgeon, who visited the spot, decided that it was the skeleton of a man; for,

although there was little doubt that it had been there nearly a century, still the skull was sufficiently preserved to satisfy him of the fact. When the place was cleared out, the bones were again buried near the spot where they were found, and a grave raised over them. The following story, put together from materials which were afterwards collected from the old inhabitants of Kingswear, may stamp it as

“THE GRAVE OF THE UNKNOWN.”

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Two centuries ago, Kingswear wore a different appearance from that which it does at present. Many of its younger inhabitants were employed in the Newfoundland trade.

About the time of King William's landing at Brixham, WILLIAM BLACKALLER was mate of a fine brig, which was chiefly employed in carrying fish from Newfoundland to the Mediterranean.

From the repeated voyages he had made, since he became a stout apprentice, he had acquired a desire to wander; and an old companion of his early life induced him to leave the service in which he had been so long employed, and enter on board a man-of-war. He was well recommended by his old master to the captain of the ship, and proving an expert and gallant seaman, he was in a few years promoted to the rank of a warrant-officer.

No man was more beloved by his companions than Boatswain BLACKALLER. He had served well at La Hogue, was at the taking of the French and Spanish ships in Vigo Bay, at the capture of Gibraltar in 1704, and at the battle of Velez Malaga, which followed soon after; and when Sir CLOUDESLEY SHOVEL was wrecked on his homeward passage, with a part of his fleet, after the unsuccessful attempt of Prince EUGENE and the Duke of SAVOY against Toulon, in 1707,

BLACKALLER was boatswain of the Association, and, with her whole ship's company, perished on the rocks of Scilly.

BLACKALLER left a widow and some children to mourn his loss. Amongst them was a boy of about eleven years of age, who, from the daring spirit which he displayed, was considered “the very image of his father.”

The melancholy bereavement which had thus suddenly befallen the family excited the feeling of all around them—the more strongly, perhaps, from the vast extent of a calamity in which so many brave men had perished ; and WILLIAM (for so he was named, after his father) was taken as an apprentice by a merchant, then carrying on a considerable business.

According to the general custom of that day, the boy had to spend the summer in Newfoundland, and the winter months in his master's house at Dartmouth. During the

latter portion of the year, the apprentices were employed in preparing rigging, and fitting the ships for their next voyage, whilst their evenings were dedicated to such instruction in writing and navigation as would render them fit to fill the situations of mates and masters, as vacancies might arise.

The boy soon became noted both for his learning and seamanship, and he was of that bold and generous spirit, that, if wrong were done to any of his companions by the boys of another house, BLACKALLER was always the first to avenge the injury, and bear the blame which should have been laid on other shoulders.

His apprenticeship ended, he still continued in the employ of his master; but a very few years expired before WILLIAM was lost to his old companions.

He had gone in one of his master's vessels with fish to the West Indies, and whilst the cargo was discharging he suddenly disap-

peared. His shipmates hunted for him in every direction about the port, but to no purpose. They could only learn that he had more than once been seen in company with some strange seamen, belonging (as it afterwards appeared) to a ship which sailed the day after WILLIAM was missed ; but where the vessel belonged, whence she came, or whither bound, no one had any knowledge : yet the manner in which she was handled, and her general appearance, shewed that those who composed her crew were not seamen of an ordinary character.

Years passed away, the widow of Boat-swain BLACKALLER had been interred in the little churchyard of Kingswear, and her family had been so long dispersed that the name was little thought of, when WILLIAM suddenly returned to the place of his birth. He came in a coasting vessel from London. Few remembered him ; and those who did could scarcely recognise, in his sunburnt

and careworn countenance, the features of their early companion. His manner was so reserved, and his countenance so full of rebuke if any one attempted to pry into his history, that few dared attempt it a second time; and those who did, only learned that he had been occupied in trade in the West Indies, and had gained enough to enable him to live comfortably at home.

But he came not alone. A beautiful girl, of about ten years of age, engrossed all his attention. Her features were not strictly English, though she was like her father: her quick and large black eye, and general manner, bespoke a Spanish origin, and shewed that she had been born under a more vivid sun than that of Europe.

MARIA was sent to school, and her father occupied his time in fishing in a small sailing-boat, which he managed with a dexterity that bespoke the seaman, not the trader; and once he thought of entering into partnership

with a man who wished him to purchase half his vessel, but it might cause inquiry about his money, and he as suddenly gave it up.

The inn at the Ferry becoming vacant, he took a lease in it; and when MARIA had been three years at school, she returned to be the mistress of her father's house, and do the office of the hostess. His disposition was becoming gloomy, and more than usually reserved; but the return of his favourite child restored him again to himself.

MARIA seldom left the bar. She had a mind far above the ordinary stamp of those who lived around her, and had more pleasure in a book than in their society. But her father's house was the resort of many masters of vessels, who, as MARIA became more accustomed to her new employment, were drawn by her to the house. Her lively manner and dark eye sold many a bowl of punch, they said, for the good landlord. He, always on his guard, read with a scrutinizing eye every

stranger that came to his house ; listening to the stories of all, but imparting little in return.

MARIA had entered on her twentieth year, when a heavy gale from the south-west, about the middle of September, drove a large ship, bound to the Spanish main, to seek shelter in the harbour. She had lost a part of her masts and rigging, and had sprung a leak, which prevented her from proceeding on her voyage, without considerable repair. It was necessary that her cargo should be taken out, which was a work of time ; and her master, having placed himself in the hands of an agent, commenced unloading.

Having heard of BLACKALLER, and anxious to look at the entrance of the harbour from the Kingswear side, he landed with his mate, and walked for an hour over the hills towards the Mewstone. On their return, they went into the Ferry-house, and ordered a bowl of punch, which was supplied by MARIA ; and

BLACKALLER being desired to join them, they entered into a conversation which lasted till late in the evening. Indeed, neither of them appeared anxious to leave the house, though neither imparted to the other the cause by which he was retained there.

The captain was a man nearly forty years of age, as bold and daring as BLACKALLER himself; but he was also of a very irritable temper, and, if thwarted when a little in liquor, he had no restraint upon his passion. Still he was an honest man, and an excellent seaman, and had for years been the favourite captain of his owners.

The mate was the son of a friend of theirs, of the name of MORDAUNT, resident in one of the West India islands, upon whom fortune had bestowed a large family, with little means to support them; and HENRY, who had been born there, was sent to London, to the owners of the ship, who had kindly promised to bring him up.

After he had received an education suited to his future prospects, he was put under the care of the master of the Meridian, (for such was the ship's name,) to be brought up to the sea.

He had now passed his twentieth year, yet he still felt under restraint when in the company of his captain—the natural effect of being so long under his guidance ; but it was mixed with that regard for him which his bold bearing, and kindness in time of danger, had inspired ; and if it did not amount to respect, it was only because the temper of his captain would sometimes lead him to acts of sudden violence towards his crew, which destroyed that feeling in the generous mind of the young mariner.

Each had been struck by the appearance of MARIA, but the captain did not perceive that it was to his mate that her eye was constantly directed, when the interesting matters on which they conversed, the land to

which they were bound, unusually rivetted her attention. Nothing passed between her and HENRY MORDAUNT that could be observed by others ; but when he shook hands with MARIA, on leaving the house, there was that secret feeling between them which evinced that each had seen enough of the other to wish for a less restrained meeting—that early fervent feeling of untainted youth, which, ripening with years, will pilot us to the nearest port to heaven in which man can cast his anchor here.

There was a warmth, too, in the manner of the captain, but it was returned only with that courtesy which she felt to be due to him as her father's guest.

The visit to the Ferry-house was frequently renewed ; but HENRY often stole there, unknown to his captain ; and when he was supposed to be at a friend's house in Dartmouth, MARIA and he were taking many a delightful walk along the cliffs, scarcely noticed by any one.

The old Castle of Gomerock was a favourite haunt of the young lovers; because there, amidst the wild wood that surrounded it, they could plight their mutual faith, unrestrained by the prying eye of curiosity.

The feelings of the captain for MARIA had not diminished; yet they had not carried him beyond a marked attention when he was at her father's house; which she always received with a frankness, which by some might be thought unfair to him in her situation. But she had been made aware of his temper; and if she feared to rouse it, who could blame her? She hoped, indeed, that nothing would be said by him about her; and that when he should leave the port he would forget her, as he had many a one before.

As the ship's cargo was again being put on board, and the time of her departure drew near, his visits to her father were more frequent, and his attentions to MARIA more decided; at length the vessel was declared

fit for sea, and the pilot dropped her down into the Bight, to be ready to sail with the early morning tide, which would turn about four.

The moon was near the full, the evening beautifully serene, the captain had gone on shore to settle his accounts, and take his last dinner with the agent, who had invited a few friends to drink success to his voyage.

All was ready on board, when HENRY, availing himself of the opportunity, landed at Kingswear for the last time. MARIA had anxiously expected him, and a few minutes brought them to their favourite haunt. They wandered about, unconscious of time, until at last they found themselves seated on the walls of the little Castle, close to the water ; for there, under the shadow of the cliff, they could freely speak of all their future hopes, and pledge their mutual vows of constancy.

HENRY had just taken from his bosom a

locket with his mother's hair, which she had given him, when he first left her for England, and which he prized as his own life; and with a feeling, which those who have not experienced it can little understand, had hung it on his MARIA's neck, charging her to look on it daily as the dearest token of his affection, the sole remains to him of a most kind and valued mother, when they were suddenly startled by the hoarse and angry voice of the captain—

"I have found you at last!" he exclaimed; "and with MARIA!"

Inflamed with fury, he collected all his strength, and struck the mate a blow which felled him to the ground. MARIA shrieked, and, whilst the captain bent over his victim, she escaped far enough up the path to be unperceived by him, whilst she watched, with wild anxiety, the scene which was to follow. She thought she saw the captain lift HENRY up, and place him on the spot where he had

been before seated. She heard a low voice, but from whom it came she could not tell ; the horror of what she had witnessed kept her rivetted to the spot on which she stood ; but when she saw the captain turn suddenly round, as if to seek her, she fled precipitately from the spot, and, entering her house, reached her room, she knew not how.

Her father had not noticed her return, and, throwing herself on her bed, she swooned away. Recovering from her faintness, she burst into a violent flood of tears, which so far relieved her mind as to recall her wandering thoughts. Her first impulse was to go to the door, and watch for those she had left at the Castle ; for the ship's boat was at the Ferry-slip, and some of her crew were seated in the kitchen, in deep conversation with her father. All was still as death without. MARIA's anxiety was too great to allow her to remain at the door : she stole unconsciously up the steps, and wandered on

towards the Castle ; but had only proceeded a short distance, when she heard a footstep. She listened attentively. It was approaching, but it was that of a single person ; and before she could decide what course to take, the captain had seized her hand.

“ Dearest MARIA ! ” he said, “ into what a state of mind have you unconsciously brought me ! I loved you, and I believed that I was not indifferent to you. I saw you smile upon my mate, but I did not regard it. The event of to-night has opened my eyes to the truth. He is faint from the blow which, in my drunken fury, I struck him ; and I have left him on the seat where I found you. My boat is at the slip. I will pull directly to the place, and carry him off to the ship ; and to-morrow, before we sail, if it be too early to come on shore, he shall write to you by the pilot. Farewell, dear MARIA ! ” he added, “ do not go there, as my men will meet you ; but wait upon the cliff, and you will see me

perform my promise. Farewell!" he repeated, but it was in a voice which was not natural to him; and when she recovered from the wild feelings which this unexpected conversation had created, a chill came over her, for which she could not account.

"The captain's manner," she said to herself, "is so changed, and there was a sort of trembling motion in his hand when he took leave of me."

She was still absorbed in these thoughts when she heard the oars of the captain's boat, and soon saw her go to the ship. In a few minutes, she was again on her way to the Castle; and with streaming eyes poor MARIA watched every movement that she fancied was taking place at the spot where she had left her lover. In her anxiety, she fancied that the boat was a much longer time there than could be necessary for taking him on board, and a thousand conjectures

crossed her mind; but they fled as fast as they came. At last she saw the boat moving towards the ship, which was too close under the opposite shore to allow MARIA to see who went on board. She could only hope all was right; and that the morning would bring her a letter, if HENRY could not come himself.

Exhausted with the various scenes through which she had passed, she at length tore herself from the spot, and retired hastily to bed, but not to sleep. She no sooner composed herself, as she believed, than the dreadful blow which the captain had given her lover rung in her ears, and his dying body seemed to lie before her. She started from her pillow, but found it a delusion. Again she tried to sleep, and the dying man appeared more plainly than before. He spoke—blessed her—and bade her adieu, for ever. She sprung from her bed, but ere she reached the floor, she fainted; and when she again

came to herself, the visions which had appeared to her in the night were so stamped upon her fevered brain, that she could scarcely doubt of their reality.

"This state of suspense," she said to herself, "is too dreadful. I will go to the cliff. I can then gaze on his vessel. I may see him, perhaps, coming to me."

Full of these thoughts, she hastily dressed herself, and reached the spot from whence she had watched the boat on the preceding night.

Morning had begun to dawn, and there was light enough to shew her that the ship was gone.

"I will follow it," she said. "I may see her again before she clears the land."

The thought gave her strength, and she ran along the cliffs, until she could see the Start Point.

The sun had now risen so far above the horizon, and cast its beams so brightly across the bay, that the ship was clearly visible,

though it had proceeded many miles upon its voyage.

"What can this mean?" she thought. "He was to come to me, or to have sent a letter by the pilot. But there has been no boat from the vessel; for I should have heard the oars, if I could not have seen it." Again the visions of the night, mixed with the real scenes she had witnessed, rushed on her mind, and so oppressed her, that she unconsciously wandered back to the Castle. She wished to descend to the fatal spot, from which, in her alarm, she had so precipitately fled; yet a stronger feeling seemed to check the wish, and it was some time before she could compose herself sufficiently to undertake the task. Half frantic, she knew not why, she hurried tremblingly down the winding path that led to it, anxious to discover, by the appearance of the ground where Henry had fallen, what had been the conclusion of the terrible scene of the preceding night,

great was her horror on finding that the grass had been recently removed, and hastily replaced ; and that the earth which had been taken from beneath it lay scattered upon the rocks, over which it had been cast into the sea. “ It is clear, then,” she said, “ that it was not a dream, but a dreadful reality. I *did* see him, and he did indeed bid me farewell—and for ever ! ” . . . .

She fell senseless on the grave.

When she recovered her senses, she endeavoured to collect all her energy to leave the spot unperceived, and return home. At length she accomplished her object : and when her father asked her what had detained her so long, he turned away before she could attempt a reply; for his MARIA was everything to him, and the tears which streamed down her cheeks confirmed his suspicion of her attachment, whilst they prevented any further inquiry into the real cause of her dejection.

Night after night would poor MARIA wander

to the spot where her lover lay, and sit and watch, by moonlight, the turf that covered his cold remains—clasping the locket to her bosom, or bathing it in tears, until her mind became half frantic: and when the paroxysm of grief was over, so dreadful a gloom would follow, that her father, alarmed at her wretched condition, tried, by every means in his power, to divert her attention, and restore her to her former cheerfulness. It was to no purpose—all around appeared to her a perfect blank; she heeded little that was said to her; her wanderings were her only solace: these became more frequent, but her nightly sufferings were known to no one. Still she struggled against her misery, and was always ready to do her duty in the house—to join her father at his meals, and watch over him with the most affectionate solicitude. In her more tranquil moments, she felt that he was all that was left to her—the only living soul for whom she had any regard.

One morning, she came not down at her usual hour. Her father, alarmed, hastened to her room. Her bonnet and cloak were gone—it was clear she had not slept there. “ Gracious Heaven !” he said ; “ what can have happened ?”

He hurried to the Castle as fast as his old and trembling limbs would carry him ; but all was peace and solitude. He searched the cliffs—he called loudly upon his MARIA ; but no voice answered him.

Half frantic, he returned to his house. As he entered, he heard some pilots talking anxiously in the kitchen.

“ I knew not what it was,” said one ; “ but I swear I saw it spring from the rock, and disappear.”

“ And so did I,” said another. “ We were just passing between the Castles,—it was about eleven o’clock ; the moon was up, and we were taking out the brig bound up the Straits. I was at the helm,—and I would

swear it must have been the ghost of a woman. I never was so frightened ; it disappeared so suddenly. The boy Hamilton was looking over the larboard gangway, and he saw it as well as I did."

"When did you see it ?" exclaimed BLACKALLER, who by this time had reached the room. "Where did you see it ? what was it like ? Speak, man !

"It was like a tall woman," he replied : "it was on the rocks under the old Castle."

"It was my MARIA ! Her frenzied brain could no longer bear the weight of its misery, and she has——" but before he could finish his sentence, BLACKALLER had fallen lifeless on the ground.

His manly heart, which had braved a thousand dangers, had lost the only tie that bound him to the world,—the beloved resemblance of her whose life he had saved at the peril of his own, and who had forsaken kindred and friends to share the fate of the captain of the "Black Rover."

He could have led again his long-lost gallant crew on the most desperate enterprise, and looked calmly on death in every shape ; but the last strand of the cable by which his storm-worn bark was moored to life, had parted—his whole soul was bound up in that of his MARIA.

Yet the mate's body lay not in the ruins of the Castle.

A seaman, in a wind-bound ship about to sail, had breathed his last, and his captain (as was too often the custom, to save the expenses of a funeral, and yet not cast the body into the sea) brought it to that spot, and buried it, soon after the mate had been carried on board his ship.

The varied scenes of that eventful night had detained the captain and crew of the Meridian till a late hour. A slight breeze from the land enabled the captain to leave the port without waiting for tide or pilot ; and thus, in the confusion and distress which

his conscious mind now told him he had brought upon himself, he sailed, without fulfilling his last promise to MARIA. And if the kind forgiveness of the mate had not wrought an entire change in his fierce temper during their voyage, the sad tidings which awaited their return to England made him indeed an altered man. HENRY MORDAUNT was ever after to him as an injured son ; he was his only care through life ; and if the captain's future conduct was a proof of a repentant mind, he died in peace.

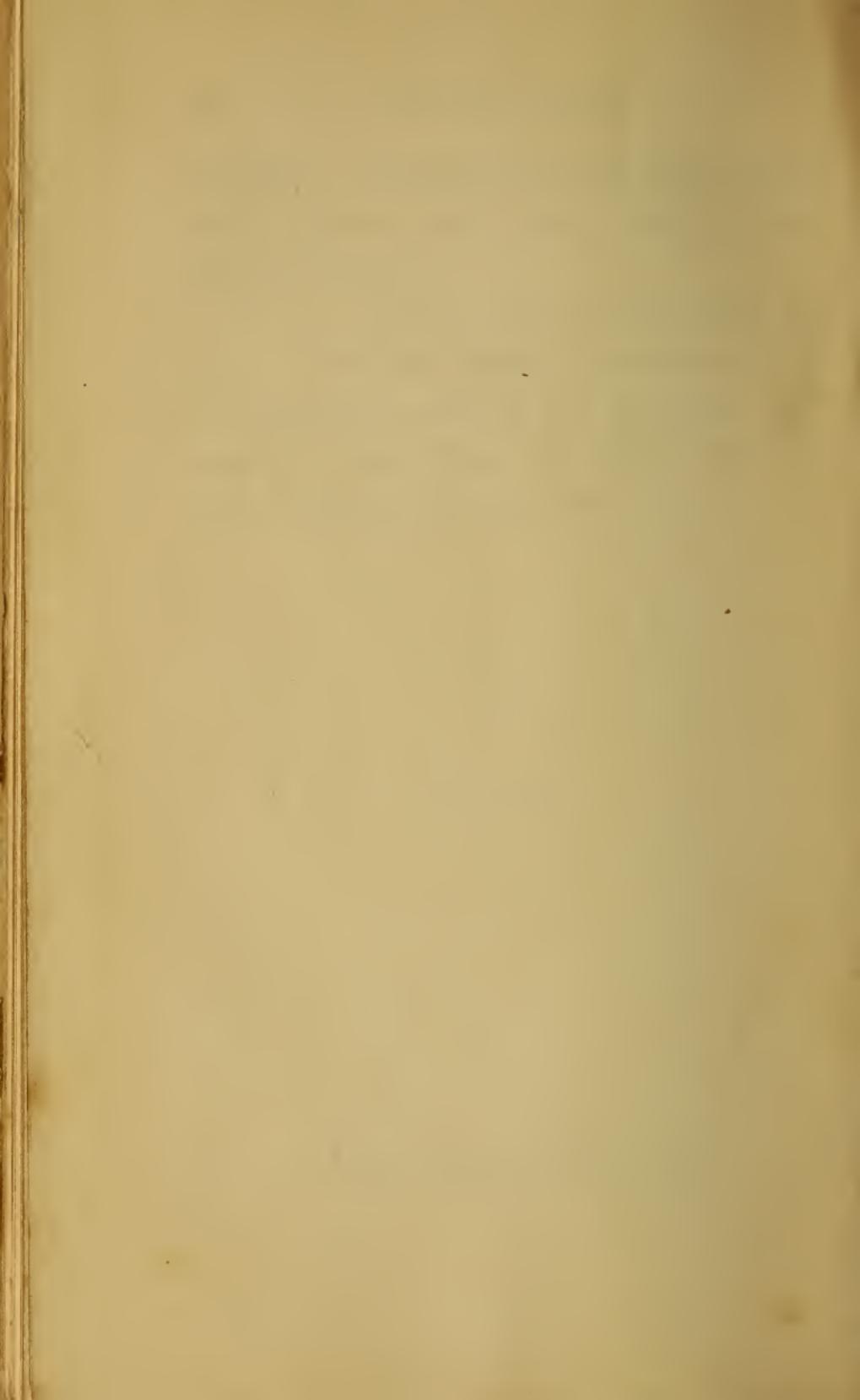
The family of BLACKALLER has long ceased to exist in Kingswear. Some poor relations shared by will the little wealth old WILLIAM had accumulated, which, if won in strife and blood, was well bestowed on those whom he had long assisted in their honest struggles against biting poverty. It was bestowed on one condition—that he should be buried in the churchyard of his native place, beside his long-lost mother, without any stone to mark

his grave. And those who shared his money felt it might be wise in them never to name their benefactor.

No trace where he was laid can now be found. If he had drawn a pirate's sword, let all who hear the story of his life pause and scan their own before they cast a stone at that of WILLIAM BLACKALLER.

THE END.







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